Weekly National Intelligencer.

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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCER.

NOTES OF TRAVEL IN THE OLD WORLD.

Written for the National Intelligencer by a Citizen of Washington.

The morning was bright and bracing as our diligence rattled out of the streets of Catania, our little postilion as sparky as a red-bird in his jacket and feathers; our conductor as sleepy as conductors usually are, and our horses as long and lean and full of latent fire as the diligence horses of Sicily are in general. The road for seven or eight miles was along the shores of the bay over a low plain, passing a few scattering farm-houses and some of the battle-fields famous in the history of the early Sicilian wars. About seven miles from Catania we crossed the river Simeto, the largest I believe in Sicily. The plain through which the Simeto runs is of great extent, and abounds in fine meadow lands. Numbers of thatched cottages, of conical shape like hay-stacks, are scattered along the banks of the river, having a very peculiar and picturesque effect. We all dismounted at the ferry, and were ferried across in a dilapidated boat, which miraculously reached the opposite bank without sinking. The road now turned slightly inland, over rough barren hills, passing near Lake Beviero, or the Lake of Lentino, a pretty little fish-pond, till we reached the town of Lentini, where the horses are changed. Lentini is the modern name of the ancient Leontinum, once ranked among the most powerful cities of Sicily. It possessed in olden times handsome temples, rich public edifices, a palestra, and various works of art, but was laid waste during the wars; and now scarcely a trace remains of its ancient grandeur. It is a wretched collection of dirty dilapidated houses, with a population of filthy and half barbarous peasantry.

Here commenced that series of calamities to which I have already incidentally referred. Eighteen miles in the bracing morning air had given us a ravenous appetite. The Hotel de Parigi was recommended by our driver as the best in the place, and although it bore very little resemblanee to any thing we had ever seen in Paris, being about as black and dirty a looking locanda as we had seen in Sicily, we ascended through the hostlery to a large bare room, with a table in the middle, and half a dozen wooden chairs ranged round the walls, and called for *qualee cosa mangera*—in plain English, something to eat. The padrona, a sour-looking woman, eyed us with a speculative glance, having reference to the size of our purses, and said: "We have nothing but eggs and bread, senores; the meat has been devoured by a party that have just gone ahead." "Very well, then," said we, "let us have the eggs and bread as soon as possible." In about half an hour we had a scanty collazine of fried eggs, to which we did as much justice as the subject permitted. "Now, Padrona, what is to pay?" "What you wish, senores." "No, no; you must fix your own price." "Then, as you have had nothing but eggs and bread, we will only charge you two dollars." "Two dollars! why that is impossible. We have only had a dozen eggs and a little bread!" "Well, then, say a dollar and a half; that is very little for four persons, senores." We paid the dollar and a half, and considered ourselves very cleverly done. As we were about to leave, our hostess reminded us of another small charge—three carlins for the room. "What!" said we, in an honest fit of indignation, "do you mean to say we are to pay for the privilege of eating your miserable collazine in this barn of a place?" "Of course, senores, you have had the use of the room." "Very true, but did you think we were going to eat out of doors?" "By no means, and that is the reason why I charge you for the accommodation of the room." It was no use to argue against a system of reasoning so cogent as this; the postilion was calling to us to come on; so we paid the three carlins for the use of the room. Passing out, we were attacked by a dirty *cuisine*, who demanded a trifling remuneration for her services. "Please your excellencies, I cooked breakfast for you!" "The deuce you did! how do you suppose we could eat it unless it was cooked? Are people in the habit of eating breakfast raw at the Hotel de Parigi?" No, senores, I cook it for them, and they always give me something for my trouble." It was no use to rebel; the cook hung to us like a leech, and it was only by paying her three carlins that we could extricate ourselves from her clutches. "Thank Heaven, we are done now!" was our involuntary exclamation as we made our exit. "Aspetta, senores," said a voice behind, "you have forgotten the *fakina*." "The what?" "The porter, gentlemen." "And pray what have you done for us?" "I attend to the baggage, senores." "But we have no baggage here; it is all in the diligence." "Ah, that makes no difference; I could have carried it for you: I must live, you know, and this is all the pay I get to support a large family." The claim was irresistible; we rebelled at first, but it was no use, the fakina followed us till we had to give him a few brecci to get rid of him. "Well, this beats Italy all hollow," was our unanimous conclusion, as we took our respective seats in the diligence, and began to enjoy the luxuries of sunshine and cigars, after the storm through which we had passed. "*Bona mano*," said our last postilion. "For what, you rascal?" "For driving you." "But you did not drive us; you were asleep all the time; we wont pay you!" However, we did pay him, after a great deal of talking. "Drive on now," shouted the Englishman. "Andate!" roared the Portuguese. "Go ahead," said I. "Aspetta, senores," cried the hostler; "*bono mano* for the hostler." We threw the hostler a few carlins, and shouted, "drive on, andate! go ahead again!" "*Aspetta!*" cried the hostler, "this is an exra diligence; extra diligences are always double price. Besides, it is two posts from Catania, and you have only paid for one change of horses." "Diabolo," roared the Portuguese, "we have only had one change, and that has just been put in now." "True, senores, but you must pay for the half-way post." "There is no post there, you scoundrel—no horses—nothing at all!" "*Da verro*, senores, but these horses have done double duty; so they must be paid for, or they can't go on!" This was too bad. We unanimously determined that we would not pay for changing horses, when no such change was made. "Go to the devil with your horses, then; we wont pay a cent more." "*Va bene*, senores!" replied the hostler, very cooly unhitching the horses, and leading them off to the stable; "you will have to go on without horses, that's all."

Here was a predicament! The inhabitants of the classical city of Lentini were pouring down from all the neighboring streets to see the diligence that was bound to Syracuse without horses. Matrons with children in their arms held up their precious babes to see the sight; piratical-looking fellows gathered around and examined us with a deliberate and speculative stare; the little boys shouted merrily, and called the attention of all straggling acquaintances to the tongue of the diligence that pointed towards Syracuse, but wouldn't pull for want of horses! What was to be done? Go to the Mayor? Perhaps there was none, and if there was, who knew the way? "Senores," said the hostler, in a soothing tone, perceiving our distress of mind, "you had better pay me, and allow me the pleasure of putting the horses in." We considered the advice, and took it. There was one universal shout of laughter as the postilion cracked his whip, and drove us rattling out of Lentini. I turned to look back as we ascended the hill, and caught a glimpse of the hostler, who was still bowing to us with the utmost gravity and politeness. If ever I meet that man on Pennsylvania avenue, it is my settled intention to do him personal violence.

From Lentini to Syracuse the distance by the public road is about twenty-four miles, making the entire distance from Catania forty-four miles. After leaving the valley of the Simeto, the country becomes barren and rugged, and there is very little to attract the attention of the traveller. What the appearance of the country may be in spring I had no means of ascertaining; but certainly a more desolate picture of poverty and barrenness I never saw than it presents in the month of October. Naked hills of parched earth and bleak rocks; a few miserable vineyards, either entirely without fencing, or surrounded by ragged hedges of prickly pear; villages rudely built of stone, without shade or comfort, and in a wretched state of ruin; an occasional mule with a load, driven by a man of beard and rags; a gang of beggars, as voracious as a pack of wild beasts; here and there a half-naked and withered woman, with the air and features of a man, scratching the ground with a hoe, or tottering under a heavy burden, while her husband lies basking in the sun; litters of dirty children rooting in the mud, without covering of any kind—these are the sights that one sees on the road to the ancient city of the Sun, the abode of gods, whose shrines no longer burn.

In a few hours from Lentini we had a good view of the Cape St. Croce and the town of Agosta. Giovanna Power, whose "Guida di Sicilia" I have now before me, says of Agosta that it is supposed to have risen out of the ruins of Megara, and Megara from those of the little Keybla. It was there, according to Herodotus, that the people were sold at auction, in the time of Gelon.

From an eminence, as we approached Syracuse, we had a very pretty view of Ortigia, the only inhabited part of the ancient city. It is built on an island connected to the main land by a long pier and a bridge, and strongly fortified by high walls, forts, and castles.

The number of gates, bridges, fortified arches, and vaulted passages through which one is driven before he can fairly consider himself within the walls of Ortigia quite surpass all powers of computation. When the diligence stopped at one of the outer gates, we were carefully inspected by a couple of officers, in flashy uniforms and feathers, who politely requested us to allow them the pleasure of looking at our passports. One stood a little in the background, with pens, ink, and paper in his hand: he was evidently a subordinate character, notwithstanding the brilliancy of his plumage, which, from a hasty estimate, I calculated to consist of the tails of three game-cocks; the other was a portly man, of grave and dignified demeanor, rich in tin buttons and red cloth epaulettes, and with a moustache that would have done credit to the Governor himself; in fact, I thought at first that he was the Governor, so imposing was his personal appearance. The passports he opened slowly and cautiously, either from habitual contempt of the value of time, or a latent suspicion that they contained squibs of gunpowder; and at last, when he had fairly spread them out, with the signatures inverted, he carefully scanned the contents for five minutes, and then calmly addressed us, in bad Italian: "Your names, Signores, if you please." Our friend the Portuguese, being the oldest, was accorded the privilege of speaking first. "My name, Signor, is Mendoza, and this lady is my wife." "Gratzia, Signor." Then, turning to the subordinate, "Put that down—Men-z-z-2-2. *Va bene.*" After some other questions as to profession, place of nativity, &c., he turned to the Englishman, "Your name, Signor?" "Mine? My name is Norval: on the Grampian hills my father feeds his flocks, a frugal swain"—— "Excuse, Signor, what did you say? "Smith, John Smith, if you like it better!" "*Va bene*, Signor; put that down: Giovanna Smiz; no, Semmit—Giovanna Semmit." The man with the tails of the game-cocks in his hat put it down. "And your name, Signor?" turning to your humble servant. "Sir," said I, with a dash of honest pride in the thought that I was giving a name known in the remotest corners of the globe, "My name is Brown—John Brown, Americana." "Gratzia! Signor," said the officer, bowing, as I flattered myself, even more profoundly than he had bowed to my friend John Smith. "Put that down—Giovanna Brovvenni." "BROWN!" said I; for I had no idea of having an honest name so barbarously Italianized. "Si, Signor, *Bruvven.*" "No!" said I, sternly, "not Bruvven—BROWN, sir." "Si, Signor—BRUIN." And Bruin was written down by the feathered man; and so stands my name to this day in the official archives of Syracuse—Giovanni BRUIN, or John Bear.

After this pleasant little passage of official dignity and governmental wisdom, we rattled on over a drawbridge, and under an arch, and through half a dozen gates, and up a long pier, and through some more gates, and finally into Ortigia, or modern Syracuse, where we rattled through an interminable labyrinth of narrow and dirty streets, our postillion alternately cracking polkas with his whip, and blowing his brains through his horn, scattering the astonished inhabitants in all directions, and running over lazy dogs in his mad career. At last we brought up near the *Hotel del Sole*, where we were dragged out of the diligence by a whole regiment of ragged *fakinas*, and piloted into the dark recesses of the *Sole* by the bald-headed Padrona.

At this Hotel we were so fortunate as to secure the services of a guide, who was not only an accomplished cicerone, but an artist of considerable merit and the author of a work on the antiquities of Syracuse. I have forgotten his name, but any body who visits Ortigia cannot fail to recognise him in the elegant person of a young man, a little *blazé* in his manners, who lounges gracefully about the *Sole*, and does things up as *valet de place* with the resigned air of a gentleman of broken fortune, who has been reduced to the necessity of bartering his classical knowledge and personal services for the contemptible sum of one dollar per diem. He will converse with you on art and history, point out to you all the antiquities of Syracuse, sell you his pictures, attend to your passport, carry your umbrella, see that your boots are blacked, and go of messages—all for the miserable pittance of a dollar a day; and if you like he will go with you to the opera, and tell you the history of the prima donna and of each of the chorus-singers individually. For my part, I took it as rather a compliment that so fashionable a looking man should be seen in my company, and, notwithstanding the horror and disgust of my young English friend, always invited him to join us in a cigar or a glass of wine, and felt quite happy when he sat with us in a public café sipping the *nero* with a languid air, or dallying elegantly over a glass of ice-cream at my expense.

In America one would be ashamed to exact menial services of so accomplished a gentleman; but in the old world it is so common as not to attract attention, except from strangers. Indeed, we republicans outdo the Europeans in things of this kind; we are much more stiff and haughty towards our subordinates than the Germans or French, and quite as much so as the English. Sometimes it is such a relief to be natural and kind that I try it for variety. The other day, up in Austria, I was caught by a party of friends in the act of drinking beer with our hack-driver, a very jolly respectable old Dutchman; but, from the disdainful manner in which they refused to join us, I felt exceedingly mortified about it, and resolved never to be good-natured again. The very same evening, walking in one of the public gardens, I met a former guide, with whom I thoughtlessly sat down to have a cup of coffee, and was in the act of being perfectly happy when my friends discovered me again, and this time they showed such decided symptoms of disapprobation that I vowed never to be sociable any more. Shortness of funds compelled me soon after to take passage in the third-class cars, where I was terribly afraid somebody would see me—some American or Englishman, I mean, because I knew nobody else would be distressed about it. There was a respectable-looking man on the next seat who spoke English. He was very chatty and agreeable, and it was quite a consolation to find so intelligent a man in the same reduced circumstances. We talked very pleasantly for some time, when he informed me that his master was in the first-class; that the said master was a countryman of mine. I was terribly mortified, of course; there was that lonely and high-minded man in the first class, and I, with the most ambitious aspirations, in the third class with his courier. However, it was some comfort to think that I had passed my time pleasantly so far, and had received all the information for which the lonely man in the first class was paying a dollar a day, besides the courier's expenses.

But this is a sad habit I have fallen into of rambling off from the main subject. I believe I was in Syracuse.

Now, if ever a man tried hard to get up some enthusiasm about a place that he had read of with wonder and admiration in early youth, I tried it in Syracuse. I went down into the ancient baths, and suffered damp and chilling airs without seeing any thing but subterranean passages and uncomfortable holes; through miles of ancient catacombs I roamed without one sentiment of admiration for the mighty dead who were no longer there; bones I picked up, but they looked so like common bones that I threw them down again: it was no use; the enthusiasm wouldn't come. As for the amphitheatre at Neapolis, it is just like any other amphitheatre, only less perfect than those of Italy. The ancient aqueduct is in so dilapidated a state that scarcely a vestige remains. The Ear of Dionysius is one of the few things worth seeing. It is a large excavation in solid rock, where it is said Dionysius the II. imprisoned his victims, and amused himself listening to their groans. The reverberation in this cavern is so great, owing to some peculiarity in the construction, that the tearing of a piece of paper produces a loud report. There are other excavations in the vicinity, of great size and extent, formerly used as prisons, but now occupied by rope-makers, which is much better. If Dionysius himself had turned his attention to the manufacture of ropes, he might have deserved hanging less, and have enjoyed a better reputation in history. The museum in Ortigia contains a very scanty collection of antiquities, dug out of the ruins of Syracuse. The chief attraction is the broken statue of Venus, which is a very beautiful work of art, and justly admired. Very little remains of ancient Syracuse except the excavations from which the stone was taken to build the city. Some of these are occupied by a miserable population of outcasts, who seem to have no houses or means of living, and prey upon traders for the wretched pittance by which they support life.

The whole region around Syracuse is rocky and desolate, and so little remains of its ancient grandeur that it requires a warm imagination to invest it with sufficient interest to repay a visit. It is difficult to conceive how a city that once contained a population of two millions should be reduced to such utter ruin: now a mere hill-side of quarries and a dirty little town with a population of seventeen or eighteen thousand. Where the land was to support such a population, or the port for such a commerce as they would have required, is a mystery that cannot be solved by any evidences now existing; and the probability is that history in this instance, as in many others, has greatly exaggerated the facts.

Some distance from the gates of Ortigia, on an eminence, is an old convent, and near it the cemetery in which lie buried the remains of two Americans—one a young midshipman, killed in a duel, and the other a gunner. We visited their graves, and took copies of the inscriptions placed upon their tombs by some kind shipmates. It was sad in a foreign land, amid the vestiges of ruin and decay, to stand by these lonely graves and think how died these two of kindred blood and language, so far away from home; but doubly sad was the young midshipman, cut short in his bright career, not by wasting disease, but by the hand of a brother officer, perhaps one who loved him well. A brief notice in the guide-book was all that told the story. He fell in a duel, near the place of his burial; and there he sleeps in a far-off land, with none to mourn over his lonely grave, none to feel a pang of pity, save the passing stranger. This was honor! Does the slayer of that youth, if he still lives, feel that he has done an honorable deed when he thinks of the lonely grave of his victim? Is there a charm in the thought to wash out the stain of blood? Has the admiration of the world made him feel in his secret heart that he is the braver for having risked his life and slain his fellow-man? Was forgiveness of an injury so base an act that it would have embittered his whole future? Oh, honor, honor! what strange beings are thy votaries!

We paid a visit to the modern catacombs in the convent, but found them much inferior to those in Palermo, of which I have given you some account. While strolling through among the bodies, accompanied by an old monk, one of the heads rolled off and fell on the ground. The monk quietly picked it up, thanked God for the accident, and placed it on the neck again, but in such an extraordinary position as to produce a most ludicrous effect. *Non fa niente!* said he, "it makes no difference now," and we walked on.

In the evening we went to an opera in Ortigia; rather an odd thing, you will admit, among the ruins of Syracuse. The piece was quite new to me, and abounded in terrible love scenes, murders, and thunderings of brass instruments. The prima donna created a great furore by her violent manner of dying; she died three times in succession by special request of the audience, and so great was the enthusiasm on the subject that I could not help joining in an attempt to get up a fourth death.

Now this, to be sure, is rather a scanty description of Syracuse—a mere budget of anecdotes, you will say. But what can I tell you without copying from the guide-book, which you can find in any public library. To be candid, I think there is more in the name of Syracuse than any thing else. The ruins are in such a state of dilapidation that one can scarcely recognise any thing, even with the assistance of a guide. Those of Agrigentum are considered much finer. After Rome, and the ruins of Pestum, near Naples, there is little worth seeing in Sicily in the way of ruins, except Sicily and its government, which may be considered a ruin on a grand scale; one of the grandest ruins, if we are to believe in its early history, in Southern Europe. War and rapine, and all the evils of military despotism; pestilence and famine, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, have scourged that ill-fated island till its mountains are bare and its valleys are waste; and the spirit of desolation broods over its ruins even as the scourge of the Divine hand yet rests upon Jerusalem and the hills of Judea.

We spent a day and a half in Syracuse, and would have continued on to Noto and Girgenti but for the want of time. It was getting late in the season, and each of us had places of Oriental travel for the coming month of November. It must be said in favor of Sicily, at this season of the year, that the climate is perfectly delicious; and the skies unsurpassed in any part of the world. The sunset scenes every evening were beautiful beyond description; and the soft tints of the distant mountains of Calabria, and the interior of Sicily, were just such as Lorraine delighted to paint, and which no other artist has ever given in such perfection. It is pleasant, after all the annoyances of passports and beggars, in a country like this, to get up in the morning at day-light, drink your coffee, pay all your bills, thank Heaven when you are through; jump into the open diligence; listen to the lively crack of the postillion's whip and the rattling of the wheels as you are whirled off out of the narrow streets; and then, when fairly beyond the gates, to snuff the fresh air as you fly along the smooth roads by the sea-shore, and watch the first glimmer of the sun as it lightens up the Eastern horizon, and trace out cities of gold among the light clouds that float over the mountains of Calabria; and draw in the fresh morning air again until you feel as if it would lift you up into the realms of pure spirits. A wild joy thrills through your blood at such a time—a gladness that you are born and in the world and capable of feeling its beauties; and you inwardly thank God for all the blessings that life still contains, even amid the ruin and desolation wrought by man's evil deeds. What if that sun has risen for centuries over battle-fields, and scorched with thirst the wounded and the dying; and mingled its rays with the flames of Etna, and shed its softest evening glories over scenes of terror and death; yet through the unfathomable past, in the alternate phases of good and evil throughout all the wicked deeds that man has wrought against man, and all the fierce convulsions of nature, it has shed its healing rays upon the human heart; it has cheered the houseless and the homeless with its warmth; it has nourished and ripened the fruits of the earth for countless generations; it has filled millions of souls with adoration of the Divine Creator; and in its light and warmth and sublime beauties, in all the joy and gladness that it sheds upon earth, there is still enough of heaven to make us feel that we are mortal here to be immortal hereafter.

Pardon these little bursts of enthusiasm, I pray you; the fact is, being unable to get up any inspiration on the subject of antiquities, I have to let out now and then on the sun and moon and stars by way of experiment; for when I see my fellow-travellers go into raptures over an old stone wall, or a musty picture, or broken column, which fails to produce the slightest effect upon me, I begin to imagine that there must be something lacking in head or heart, and it is only by soaring among the mountains and clouds that I can realize a particle of enthusiasm.

Leaving Catania on the evening of our arrival from Syracuse, we passed in sight of the Cyclopean, and soon after dark reached a large town, distant from Catania about ten miles. Here we stopped for the night, much to the disgust of our Portuguese friend, who altogether disapproved of the hotel. The next day's travel along the sea-shore was the most pleasant we had enjoyed in Sicily. Here we entered into a more fertile region along the base of Mount Etna, abounding in green valleys and luxuriant vineyards, and dotted over with pretty little towns and farms. The road was lined on either side with pleasant-looking and picturesque villas, and the population had a much more thrifty appearance than that of the southern part of the island. At *Aci Reale*, a handsomely situated town about half way between Catania and Messina, our party took mules to go up to the ruins of Taormina, about an hour distant up the mountain. My experience in mules was not such as to encourage another trial, so I walked again. The town of Taormina is one of the most picturesque old places in Sicily. It was built, I believe, in the time of the Romans, as also the *Teatro di Taormina*, which is the chief attraction of the place. The ruins of the theatre are some short distance from the town, and consist of a large amphitheatre, the front walls of a splendid edifice, various pillars, and vaults and old walls. For scenic effect, I have seen nothing in Italy or any part of Europe to surpass the Teatro di Taormina, surrounded as it is on three sides by immense rocks and towering mountains, the peak of Etna in the distance, the whole line of the Straits of Messina and the mountains of Calabria in front. I stopped long enough to explore the ruins and make some sketches, rather to the annoyance of my travelling friends, who generally did their admiration up in broken exclamations, and left me to do the artistical part while they pushed on in search of further antiquities.

On our arrival in Messina, I had the pleasure of meeting a fellow-townsman, Mr. CLEMENTS, United States Consul, from Washington, and it affords me additional pleasure now to acknowledge my indebtedness to him for many kind favors during my stay in Messina.

There is so little to be seen in Messina that we got through on the day after our arrival. A few churches, convents, and old walls are about the only sights in the way of antiquities that the traveller is called upon to endure; and, after seeing these, he may pass the time pleasantly enough rambling about the neighborhood, which is full of fine scenery, or lounging about the wharfs, where he will enjoy something in the way of maritime life on shore. The position of the town is scarcely less picturesque than that of Palermo, and for all the evidences of progress and civilization I greatly preferred this neighborhood to any part of Sicily.

I cannot leave Messina without giving you our adventure in search of the breach made in the walls of the city during the last revolution. This time (my second visit to Messina) I was accompanied by an Irish major from India and an old English gentleman returning from the East, both fellow-passengers on the steamer from Malta, and very jovial and agreeable travelling acquaintances. We had but three hours on shore, the steamer having merely touched for passengers. It was, therefore, on landing a matter of consideration in what way we should spend our time most profitably. The Englishman was in favor of seeing the breach at the risk of every thing else; the major of that happy and accommodating temperament which renders a man capable of enjoying all things equally; and I, having on a former occasion seen every thing in Messina except the breach, yielded against an internal conviction that a hole in a wall is not an object of peculiar interest. But habitual martyrdom makes a man magnanimous, and the old gentleman was bent upon seeing the breach; he had set his heart upon it; he had enlightened us upon the historical points, and the breach we must see. Nor would he have a guide, for he spoke French and could ask the way. The major, too, spoke a foreign language; it was Guzerat or Hindoo, and not likely to be very useful in the streets of Messina, but it might come in play; and I prided myself on speaking Italian: that is to say, (between you and myself,) a species of Italian formed chiefly of Arabic, French, Tuscan, Neapolitan, and English, but chiefly of English Italianized by copious additions of vowels at the end of every word. Yielding, however, to the superior zeal of our English friend, Mr. ——, we kept modestly in the rear, while he took the middle of the main street, and kept a sharp lookout for any intelligent-looking man that had the appearance of understanding French. "*Parlez vous Français*, monsieur," said Mr. —— to the very first man he met. "*Nein!*" replied the man, "*spracker de Deutch?*" "Talk to him in Hindoo," said Mr. ——. The major addressed him accordingly in Hindoo. "*Nicht*," said the man. "May be he understands Italian," suggested the major. "*Parle Italiano?*" said I, "Si signor, *im poco*." "Dove il *breecha* in the *Muro*," said I, going to the full extent of my Italian. The man looked puzzled, but, not wishing to appear ignorant, addressed me in such a complicated mixture of German and Sicilian that I had to stop him at length. "*Si, si, gratzia.*" "What does he say?" inquired Mr. ——. "I think he says the wall is somewhere outside the city; but he speaks abominable Italian." "Humph! never mind; here's a gentleman that speaks French, I'm certain. Monsieur! I say monsieur! (calling to a stiff-looking individual just passing,) "*Parlez vous Francais*, monsieur?" "No, signor; Italiana." Upon this hint I spoke Italian, as before. The stiff man unbent himself, and politely conducted us round the corner, where he showed us the ancient CHURCH; and bidding us adieu, went his way with the same grave and studied aspect. I shall never forget the look of mingled doubt and disappointment with which my venerable English friend surveyed me. "Did you ask him for a church?" "No, I asked him for the wall with the breach in it." From that moment, I believe Mr. —— suspected me of bad Italian. Disappointment, however, only added to his zeal. Pushing on with a determined step, he led the way through innumerable streets, till at length we reached an open piazza, where we halted close by a hack-stand to gain breath and take an observation. Here we were soon surrounded by such an eager gang of vetturini, in consequence of an indiscreet question in Hindoo by the major, that we had to work ourselves out of the crowd by main force. "Leave it all to me," said Mr. ——, "I'll find somebody presently who speaks French. Ha! that man has a French look. I say, monsieur, monsieur!" The man stopped. "Parlez vous Français, monsieur?" "Oui, monsieur." "I told you so," said our friend, turning to us triumphantly; "see what perseverance will do;" and then he propounded a series of questions to the strange gentleman concerning the location of the wall, interrupted at every pause by "Oui, monsieur, oui, oui." "Now, sir, can you tell us where it is?" (still in French.) What language the individual addressed spoke in reply it would be impossible to say; but it was brief and to the point, for he immediately conducted us round another corner and showed us the DILIGENCE OFFICE, after which he touched his hat politely and walked on. The Englishman regarded the sign upon the diligence office with ineffable disgust, and then casting a ferocious look after the stranger, struck his stick heavily upon the pavement and said: "Damme, if that's French! He doesn't understand the language!" For some time previously I had observed a suspicious-looking fellow dodging from corner to corner in our rear, who now came up touching his hat respectfully. "Gemmen," said he, "Me speakee Inglees. What you want?" Our friend explained in full, evidently much relieved at this sudden accession to his cause. "Yes, yes, me know," replied the man. "Come on." We followed with a good will, certain that our troubles were at last at an end; and really I began to feel quite interested in the wall from the sheer force of disappointment. We had proceeded some distance through a labyrinth of streets, when Mr. ——, who was engaged in a hopeless attempt to extract additional information out of the guide concerning the wall, stopped short, and indignantly uttered these words: "You infernal rascal, that's not what we want!" Now, the full force of this violent language was of course lost upon the major and myself. The Englishman turned back muttering something about a deplorable state of morals; and upon consulting his watch found that it was about time to go on board the steamer.

That night we had a magnificent view of Stromboli in full blast; but the Isles of Lipari on another occasion. For the present, I am yours, truly, J. R. B.

OFFICIAL DOCUMENT.

CONTRACTS FOR SUPPLIES BY ARMY OFFICERS.

The following Documents were communicated to the Senate yesterday by the Secretary of War:

WAR DEPARTMENT, WASHINGTON, APRIL 7, 1852.

SIR: I have received a copy of a resolution of the Senate directing the Secretary of War "to inform the 'Senate: First, whether any of the officers of the United 'States army have been contractors to furnish supplies to 'the Government of the United States. Secondly, if such 'cases exist, what were the rates of such contracts as 'compared with those of other persons contracting for 'the same things to be delivered at the same time and 'places. Thirdly, the names of the officers making and 'sanctioning such contracts. And, lastly, as to the measures, if any, which have been taken by the Department 'in such cases."

In reply I beg leave to report that some two months since it was reported to me that certain officers of the army stationed in California had been engaged in purchasing articles of supply for the army, and selling them at a profit to the Government. On investigating the matter, I found that Bvt. Lieut. Col. Hooker had been summoned before a court martial, ordered by Bvt. Brig. Gen. Hitchcock, commander of the tenth military department, charged with "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," in being engaged in such transactions.

The evidence in the case established beyond all doubt that the accused and Second Lieut. Bvt. Capt. Alfred Gibbs did contract with Second Lieut. Geo. H. Paige, 2d infantry, acting assistant quartermaster at the post of Sonoma, in California, to deliver to him at said post 150 tons of hay, at the rate of $85 per ton, and that the hay was delivered and paid for at that price, and that they realized on the whole transaction a profit of about $12 per ton; also, that the accused did contract to deliver to the same officer, at the same place, 100 cords of wood at $8.75 per cord.

Bvt. Lieut. Col. Hooker was "fully and honorably acquitted." This decision is only to be explained on the supposition that in the opinion of the court it is not "unbecoming an officer and a gentleman" to engage in such transactions.

The proceedings of the court were submitted to Bvt. Brig. Gen. Hitchcock, by whose order the court had been convened, and the sentence was confirmed by him. In justice to that officer, however, I herewith append an extract from his order, confirming the sentence, in which, while he seems to admit the *right* of officers to make such contracts, he strongly condemns the practice.

As regards the prices at which these articles were contracted for, as compared with those of other persons contracting for them at that post about the same time, the Quartermaster General reports to me that the price for hay had varied considerably—as high as $50.50, $60, $62, and $75 per ton had been paid for it; but in the same month in which this contract was made Assistant Quartermaster Allen had purchased hay at $15 less per ton. The price paid for the wood, as compared with those previously paid, does not appear high. It was proven, however, before the court martial that public notice was given for proposals, and that in both instances the officer's were the lowest bidders.

As there was no law or regulation prohibiting officers of the army from contracting with the Government, and as Bvt. Lieut. Col. Hooker had been fully and honorably acquitted by the court not only of the charge, but of every specification, I did not feel that I should be justified in recommanding to the President the adoption of a course which, under other circumstances, I might have felt it my duty to recommend.

Bvt. Capt. Gibbs, who was associated with Lieut. Col. Hooker in one of these contracts, presented himself in person at the Department, frankly acknowledged his error, but solemnly protested that when he engaged in this transaction he was not aware that it would be considered improper. For this reason, and on account of his youth and previous high character as an officer and a gentleman, I considered that he would be sufficiently punished by a reprimand.

I deem it but just to both these officers to add that this erroneous opinion as to the propriety of these transactions was not confined to themselves. They appear to have been known to all the officers at the post. Major P. Kearny, who commanded the post, and whose duty it was to watch over the disbursements, signed the contract as an attesting witness, and two other officers, Paymaster Leonard and Assistant Surgeon Campbell, were sureties for its faithful performance.

I came to the conclusion, however, that some means should be speedily adopted to prevent a repetition of such an abuse. As soon, therefore, as I was informed of these transactions, I addressed a letter to the Committees on Military Affairs, both of the Senate and House of Representatives, recommending that a law should be passed prohibiting similar abuses in future. A copy of this letter is herewith transmitted.

Several weeks having elapsed, and not finding that any action had been taken on the subject by either committee, I issued a regulation, a copy of which is herewith transmitted. I do not consider, however, that this regulation supersedes the necessity of an act of Congress. Besides that, a law carries with it a higher sanction than a mere regulation of the Department; the sentence of a court martial for violating the latter would be at the discretion of the court.

Since the receipt of the resolution of the Senate I have learned of other operations of this kind, in which both Lieut. Col. Hooker and Bvt. Capt. Gibbs were engaged. The Department is now investigating them.

It has been also reported to me that Capt. Alexander W. Reynolds, assistant quartermaster, stationed at Santa Fe, New Mexico, purchased supplies from two individuals who were acting in the capacity of forage masters under him; and in one instance purchased three horses from himself. That matter is also undergoing an investigation.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant, C. M. CONRAD, Secretary of War.

Hon. W. R. KING, President of the Senate.

Extract from the order of Gen. Hitchcock.

"The general commanding feels called upon to express the opinion he entertains that a general practice, were it to be entered into, of officers of the army coming into competition with citizens in proposing for and entering into contracts with officers of the disbursing departments of the army for furnishing army supplies, could not fail to be productive of the most mischievous consequences. It is calculated to beget a division of interests among officers within the army detrimental to harmony, and to create and justify an opinion in the country that the army itself, through its members, may pursue an interest altogether separate from that of the Government, with the danger of pursuing that interest when contrary to that of the Government. That particular cases may occur in which individual officers may derive a profit from such contracts without loss to the Government, and even to the pecuniary advantage of the Government, is not denied; but the consideration of dollars and cents, under such circumstances, would be more than counterbalanced by the dangers to be apprehended from a general practice of entering into such contracts, and it would be far better, in the opinion of the general commanding, for officers to abstain from the exercise of a right of this nature not prohibited by regulations, and to look for indemnity for the forbearance to the peculiar constitution and character of the profession of arms, and the high social aspect of the army of which they are the members.

"E. A. HITCHCOCK,
"Colonel 2d Infantry, Brevet Brig. Gen."

WAR DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 9, 1852.

SIR: A great abuse in the army has within a few days past come to my knowledge, which requires legislation to correct it.

An officer of the army, stationed in California, purchased at various times a quantity of hay and fuel for the purpose of selling these articles at a profit to the Government, and actually sold them to the acting assistant quartermaster at the post at a heavy advance and a very large profit. Thus we find an officer of the army availing himself of his position to enter into competition with the Government in the purchase of supplies for the very post at which he is stationed, and that too in a country where supplies of all kinds are procured with difficulty, and only at extravagant prices.

The officer was charged with these acts by another officer before a court-martial, and was acquitted. The fact charged was proven beyond a doubt, and the decision of the court appears to have been based on the fact that there was no law prohibiting such conduct. Another officer was concerned in one of these contracts, and several were witnesses to it.

The consequences that would flow from this practice, if it were to become general, are too manifest to require illustration. Frauds, peculation, and abuses of all kinds, equally destructive of the public interests and of the character of the army, would be the inevitable result.

I therefore respectfully suggest whether it would not be advisable to prohibit by law all officers of the army from being directly or indirectly concerned or interested in the purchase of supplies for the army under pain of dismissal from the service.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant, C. M. CONRAD, Secretary of War.

To CHAIRMEN of Military Committees of Senate and House of Representatives.

WAR DEPARTMENT, MARCH 29, 1852.

The Department has learned with great surprise and regret that certain officers in California have been engaged in purchasing articles of indispensable necessity to the service, such as fuel, hay, &c., and selling them at a profit to the Quartermaster's Department. Such transactions are injurious to the public service, and highly derogatory to the character of the army. All officers are therefore prohibited from purchasing any articles that are required for the use or consumption of the army, with a view to selling the same, or from being directly or indirectly interested in such purchases. All officers or agents of the Quartermaster and Commissary departments are prohibited from purchasing from officers of the army.

Any officer violating this regulation will be forthwith reported to the President, and his dismissal from the service recommended. C. M. CONRAD, Secretary of War.

THE REBELLION IN CHINA.

CORRESPONDENCE OF THE N. YORK COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER.

CANTON, JANUARY 26, 1852.

You may have observed, in the newspapers, frequent reference to a rebellion in Kwangsi. This appears to cause more notice abroad than it does in Canton. There is no excitement here, and from all that I can learn the disturbance is limited to a portion of the Kwangsi province, and is not likely to extend to others. The rebels can be more easily bribed than beaten into submission, and in the end Emperor Haamfoong will probably deem it wise to "buy up" the chiefs, instead of trying to catch them. The Chinese are a very singular people. They sometimes rebel against certain mandarins, who become notorious for their rapacity and corruption; but this is no evidence of dissatisfaction with their political institutions. On the contrary, these are considered by all the Chinese to be the perfection of human wisdom. Here are no theorists of "human rights," no apostles of "liberty, equality, and fraternity," to upturn the foundations of society. The Chinese are perfectly content with the theory of their Government, and may justly be termed (as they have been) "a nation of incurable conservatives." They may not be much attached to the Tartar dynasty, and, as a general thing, are probably quite indifferent about it; and if another family should be seated upon the throne, and maintain the same system of Government, the great mass of the people would care little about it. There are no broad and invidious distinctions of classes among them. The road to the highest honor is open to all, and the son of a coolie may become the Prime Minister, if he has the talents and perseverance to tread the paths of literature, always open, and open to all, which lead to the highest offices in the Empire. Assaults from abroad, and the introduction of foreign ideas, may tend to disturb the system; but so long as the exclusive policy is maintained, so long will the Chinese quietly revolve in the circle which has been woven round them.

The foreign trade is fast leaving Canton and concentrating at Shanghai. The latter port is near to the heart of the country, and the great producing and consuming districts of China. Full three-fourths of all the American trade will be transacted there next year.

We hear that Commodore Aulick is soon expected in the large steam frigate Susquehanna, and it is rumored that he has instructions from the President to visit Japan with a considerable fleet. As the Japanese islands are situated upon the great highway between Shanghai and California, it appears to be right that the Government of the United States should demand from the authorities a clear understanding as to the manner in which our ships shall be received, which may be driven by stress of weather or otherwise to seek a harbor on their shores. The success of an expedition to Japan, with this object, will depend altogether upon the tact and firmness of the commander.

The Chinese are going over in large numbers to California, but nearly all of them with the intention of returning as soon as they have obtained a moderate competency. They do not like the idea of being buried in a strange land. They must not be considered as emigrants, who intend to settle and become citizens of the new world, but merely as hired laborers and adventurers.

The trade between China and California is becoming quite valuable.

A writer describes the oldest house in Manchester (Massachusetts) as a curiously built dwelling, having two stories in front and one in the rear, mostly constructed of oak timber, and set on a rock, where the people of the present day would no more think of placing a house than they would on the Himmalaya mountains. This house was built in 1643, and is therefore about two hundred and nine years old; was one of the first put up in the town, and its original proprietor was Shadrach Norton. The bricks in the chimney are a great curiosity, some of them weighing from eight to ten pounds each.

THE SWISS RIFLE.—The following description of this weapon we find in the London Morning Chronicle:

"The weapon weighs only 9½ pounds. The bore is very small. The ball weighs only 255 grains, hardly one-third as much as that of the Minnie rifle, and in form it is not unlike a piece of tobacco pipe, tapering to a point, and nearly an inch in length. As for the range of the Swiss rifle we need only mention that, at a distance of 1,000 paces, 160 balls (fired from a rest) struck a target of eight feet six inches square, and penetrated three planks of deal, placed one inch asunder, besides passing half through a fourth. At this range, the extreme height of the trajectory—the path of the ball on the air—was 33 feet 6 inches; whilst at a range of 500 yards it was only eight feet six inches—consequently, if fired at a mark 500 yards off, the ball would scarcely fail to strike any soldiers, cavalry or infantry, who might be between the gun and the object. Being so light, a soldier with this rifle can carry 150 rounds of ball cartrige, while he can carry but forty rounds on the Minnie system.